

Hari Hara Kshetra

From;-

K.T.Narasimhan, M.A.,P.G.Dip.Arch.,Dip in Cons. (France)

Vyakarana, Sahitya Siromani , Siksha Sastri , P.O.L.,

**Superintending Archaeologist ,{Retd} , A.S.I. , Former Consultant
Archaeologist / Conservationist to the Government of Tamil Nadu.**

A Comprehensive Report on the Monuments of Narsimhulapalle , Known as Hrihara Kshetra .

An open invitation was extended to me long ago by **Shri. Kalavakota Keerthi Kumar**, the managing Trustee of this **Harihara kshetra temples**, situated on the hillock of Kotla Narsimhulapalle, Gangadhara Mandal, Karimnagar District, Telangana State. I got an opportunity to visit this place on 11-3-2020, in the company of Shri. Kalava Kota Keerthi kumar. During my short stay over there, I could study these temples' basic architectural concept to some extent. With this very little knowledge and experience I want to furnish a comprehensive report based on art and architecture of these ancient edifices in the form of structural temples and Bas-relief sculpture there in.

Significance of Kotla Narsimhulapalle;-

This village seems to be very ancient one, and its formation was done or designed as per the ancient norms. According to **Manasara** (one of the ancient texts on art, architecture and iconography) a village or habitation should have the temples of lord Siva, Vishnu, Kali and grama-devata etc. It describes elaborately about formation of main streets/cross streets and especially the location of the said temples.

In the chapter of **grama** (village) **lakshana** (specifications) as mentioned.

Mitre chiva pade chaapi Vishnu murthe etheshtakam !

Ese Sankaram samsthapya parjanya chotite thatha !!

Pitru devesa kone va yatha Nrisimhalayam bhavet !

Agni kone yatha Ramam Gopala Aalayameva va !!

What I noticed here at Kotla Narsimhulapalle , this village formation was done as per ancient norms. That is why here lord Siva temple on the north-east, Vishnu temple on the west, village protector Hanuman temple in between habitation and temples, streets are in east west orientation and so on, clearly indicates that the **Bas-relief of Ugra Narasimha** and this village formation might have been done simultaneously. After few centuries the cave and structural temples were built by the Rashtrakuta kings using the locally available granite stones.

Orgin of Narasimha cult ;-

Lord Vishnu took several avataras (incarnations) to protect Vedas, Dharma, Lakshmi and Bhudevi so on. This is known as *Dasavatara* of Vishnu. Among them the Narasimha avatara is the fourth one in chronological order. In other words, this is the first and foremost important avatara to save HIS bhakta, the demon child Prahlada, the son of the most powerful and egoist demon emperor Hiranyakasipu. In fact this is the first anthropomorphic form of Vishnu. HIS preceding three avataras were Matsya, Kurma, and Varaha. They were in animal form and can not have sixth sense or speaking capability. After Narasimha, all succeeding avataras in human form. Thus, the Narasimha avatara is the most unique one for two reasons.

- i) HE appeared as sthuna Narasimha (in Rgveda sthuna means sthambha). Out of sthambha (pillar) HE not only emerged suddenly to save the pious Rakshasa child Prahlada , but also to prove his words are truthful. Because, when demon Hiranyakasipu questioned his genius son “ where is your lord “? The child instantly replied “ Yeko vishnur

mahatbutam prutakbhun anekasaha “ means HE is the only lord exists everywhere on the three universe (Bhu,Bhuva and Suvaha).

- ii) All avataras of Vishnu were well designed and fully pre-planned, before HIS emergence, whereas, this Narasimha avatara is the only incarnation without any pre-determination of place or time to come out. The greatness of this avatara well described as “ Yasya abhavat bhakta jana aartihantuhu pitrutvam anyesh avicharya turnam ! Sthambhe avatarah tam ananya labyam Lakshmi Nrusimham saranam prapatye “. This Sanskrit verse clearly speaks about the aim and purpose of Narasimha avatara. It describes lord Narasimha had instantly emerged out of sthambha (Pillar) , when Hiranyakasipu kicked the pillar to test his son’s word and belief. He not only saved his bhakta, but also killed the demon to re-establish dharma.

In India the composite state of Andhra Pradesh is the epicentre of Narasimha temples. They are in the form of cut-in, cut-out, structural, bas-relief and bracket figures, made in imperishable material of rock, starting from 4th cent. C E onwards. Almost all ancient Narasimha temples are located on hills / hillocks / monolithic rock. Among them very famous and noteworthy Narasimha’s nine forms of temples are located at Ahobhila, Kurnool district of present Andhra Pradesh. They are known as Jwala, Ahobhila, Malola, Kroda, Karancha, Bharghava, Yoga, Chatravata and Pavana. Besides, There are several ancient Narasimha temples in the entire South India, starting from Badami Chalukyas, Pallavas, Early Pandyas, Cholas, Kadambas, Rashtrakutas and Kakatiyas. Thus, the Narasimha cult is one of the most popular cults in the entire southern India right from ancient period to down

the centuries. Many ancient temple pillars are depicting Narasimha on the square as sthuna Narasimha. For example this type of engraved Narasimha can be seen at Alarhpur, Nandi kandi, Alampur, Panagal, Palampet, Hanama konda etc.

Significance of Shodasa Bhahu ugra Narasimha;-

This Ugra Narasimha (Popularly known as Bharghava) was chiselled as a gigantic Bas-relief sculpture on a monolithic rock cliff at kotla Narsimhulapalle village, Gangadhara Mandal, Karimnagar District, Telangana State. The whole hillock is of an inferior quality of granite variety. It has a light ochre colour with black particles and slight mica content too. It is inherently weak and very difficult to polish or making minute art/ iconographic feature on its surface. Despite of this disadvantage the master craftsman (sculptor) had made an unparalleled and a gigantic bas-relief sculpture on the western slope of the rock. Its physical anatomy and iconographic decoration is commendable.

It appears that it could have been made during the period of either Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi or early Rashtrakutas who ruled this part of south India during 4th Cent. C E. According to Professor Mirashi “ there were several Rashtrakuta families ruling South India in the 4th Cent. C E. Manaka was founded the Kuntala country with its capital Manaka. This family was known as Kundalesa. “ Therefore, this bas-relief sculpture can be dated to 4th -5th cent. C E, if not earlier.

On the rock cliff roughly 8 to 10” a rectangular cut was made below one third of the height of the rock from the top, from where the bed rock looks like a plain slate. In the already published hand book this sculpture is mentioned as

“Ashtamukha Shodasa Bhahu Ugra Narasimha”. It cannot be called so, because, originally only five faces were chiselled not eight as mentioned. On any bas-relief sculpture, no sculptural activity is possible on its back, which cannot be seen unless this bas-relief is completely chopped/destroyed. It is assumed as ashtamukha, because of the 16 arms. In my view it is incorrect. There are several ancient Vishnu sculptures available in many temples with one face having chatur-bhuja/ ashta-bhuja/ shodasa- bhuja. Therefore, this bas-relief Narasimha is pancha Mukha Shodasa Bhahu Ugra Narasimha may be more authentic based on the depiction. However, scholars may differ from my point of view.

Uniqueness of this sculpture;-

This is rarest rare depiction of an Ugra Narasimha with so many heads and hands that to on a bas-relief form. The sculptor’s imaginary and craftsmanship is commendable. On an inferior rock surface, he made viscously protruding several eye balls looking at demon’s body is the feast of the eyes of the onlooker. Besides, the splitting scene is showing so many other activities of Narasimha is depicted so carefully and minutely, with the result the whole scenery is so lively even today after several centuries. It appears the main face was damaged through vandalism, not by age or natural defacing. Because, one can notice that a blow on the left eye side of the image with deep depression on right angle shows that somebody wantonly might have hit with force to damage this sculpture. If it is a natural one, the chipping or flaking will have a uniform depression and not like this deep cavity at one point. Another notable beauty of this sculpture, its chest is wider on the upper side and sharp narrowing of 30 degree towards vertebra, symbolize that the

Narasimha has made prana-bhandha (holding breath) to get more strength to his hands to split the demon's body. This imaginary of the master craftsman is note worthy to mention and it indicates that the sculpture was made with at most care as described in various puranas. Such wonderful depiction can be noticed only on the sculptures, which were made in early Christian era.

This Ugra Narasimha sculpture is heavily decorated with karnda makuta, three rows of necklaces, another hara with a square pendent, looks like a **Thiruman** (a religious symbol for vaishnavas representing vishnu and lakshmi on the fore head) goddess lakshmi in standing posture on his vakshasthala (On left side of the chest) , which resembles very well with the beautiful cut-out sculpture of early Pallava at Singaperumal koil , Kancheepuram district, Tamil Nadu.

This Ugra Narasimha wears a salagrama mala , which runs up to the wrist of the main pair of hands. Besides, his hands except the main two are holding various attributes. His left hand holds Hiranya kasipu's body, where as the right hand is piercing the demon. This act is so meticulously depicted by showing the hands position. The left hand looks like an inverted "V" , where as the right hand upper portion is straight and the fore arm is slightly twisted and nails are splitting the body. Both hands wrist is in opposite angle to each other are a real testimony of the master craftsmanship. At the bottom of the sculpture on the right Garuda, Bhakta Prahlada in anjali mudra, on the left a couple (probably the king and queen, who made this sculpture) with folded hands and moving towards Ugra Narasimha. Similar scene can be seen in Adi Varaha cave, at Mahabalipuram, where the Pallava king Narasimha Varman – I is moving with his consort

towards Adi-Varaha. This could be another important identification to date this Ugra Narasimha to the early period of Christian era.

Here, at Narsimhulapalle there are three ancient temples. Besides the bas-relief sculpture and Hanuman. On stylistic basis, they were excavated/ constructed during Rashtrakuta period. Thus, the special features of the Rashtrakuta dynasty are briefly described here under.

The Indian structural temple architecture was more or less got its full developments, by the time when Rashtrakuta dynasty was well established all over the Southern and Western India. Their predecessors like Chalukyas of Badami, Eastern Chalukyas of Vengi , Pallavas, Early Pandyas, Gangas, Kalachuris, Pratiharas etc., had excavated / constructed numerous rock-cut caves, monolithic rathas, as well as full fledged structural temples of sudha variety. Therefore, by the time when Krishna- I had excavated the largest cut- out and world famous Kailasanatha monolithic temple at Ellora, there was no drench in architectural knowledge or skilled hand (Sthapathy).

Despite of this the Rashtrakutas put their stamp on imperishable material(stone) by inventing some commission and omission on the plan and elevation as suits to the already existing architecture, or in their own creation. Their outstanding contribution in temple architecture is new creation of various decorative and massive doorjam and vedi. This unique feature can be seen at many temples in India and even the world famous and biggest structural temple of Ankor Wat in Cambodia.

In Andra Pradesh and Telangana they have depicted various form of Narasimha over sthuna (Pillar) as bracket figure. As

I mentioned earlier, in Rigveda sthuna means pillar, from where Narasimha had emerged. Keeping this puranic evidence in mind, on pillar square Yoga, Malola, Bharghava and so on were made at Alampur, Nandi kandi, panagal, Palampet, Ahobhila, Hanama konda, Yadagiri etc.

Siva (Viswanatha) Temple;-

This temple is located on the north east, while claiming the hillock. On plan, it consists of garbha-griha, antarala and mukha—mandapa. The mukha- mandapa has two rows of four pillars. Out of these two rows, the inner row pillars have the influence of Chalukhya, where as the outer row belongs to Rashtrakuta period. This difference can be noticed on pillars. The inner row was made as quadrangular(four sided) as Brahmakanta, where as the outer row was made as octagonal, known as Vishnu kanta. Besides, inner row's pillar squares are plain, the outer row pillars have creeper and sikhara design. This distinct difference clearly speaks that this temple was built during the transitional period of Eastern Chalukhyas of Vengi and Rashtrakutas. Therefore, this can be datable 7th - 8th Cent.C E.

Narasimha (Malola) Temple;-

This temple is located on the hillock. It is cave cum structural temple, facing west. It is a natural caravan created by two huge rock boulders leaning on each other from south to north orientation, creating a cave shape shelter with opening from the west. To convert this as a typical garbha-griha a stone wall was erected on the south. In fact on this monolithic rock cliff, the beautiful bas- relief of Pancha-Mukha Shodasa Bahu Ugra Narasimha was made in the past. This temple on plan has a rectangular garbha-griha, antarala, and mukha-mandapa. Like any other Narasimha

temple, this is also facing west. In India all Narasimha temples facing west, because, lord Narasimha was waiting for the sandhya kala, means the end of day and beginning of the night to kill Hiranyakasipu. He got the boon that he could not be killed during day or night, inside or out side of the house, on earth or space, by men or animal. Keeping all these criteria into the account lord Vishnu took Narasimha avatara to kill him.

Rama Temple;-

This is facing east and located on the north west. It appears that this was built after Narasimha temple. Its lintel has clear sikhara design, which indicates that the Rashtrakuta art and period too. Besides, Rama's pita has sikhara and creeper design. These two temples are datable to the last quarter of 7th cent. Or beginning of 8th cent.,CE.

Recomendation for proper conservation and preservation;-

1. Existing several coat of lime wash should be removed carefully from the walls and pillars.
2. Chemical preservative coat may be given to the entire stone members to prevent any natural decay.
3. Bas-Relief on Ugra Narasimha's main pair of hands (holding the demon) are visibly detached from the bed rock. It needs very urgent unification . It should be done with the help of a trained Modaller.
4. In future instead of cement lime may be used as binding material, which is more friendly with rock and has long life.
5. Electrical existing fittings may be redone using rock joints as holding point to minimise the damage to the monument.

This report is an illustrative and not exhaustive one on this Hari Hara kshetra monuments.

Sd/

(K.T.Narasimhan)

-

